DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 371 873 PS 022 475

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TITLE Increasing Teacher/Parent Awareness of Developmentally Appropriate Movies for 3-6 Year Olds through Use of a Rating Scale.
PUB DATE 94
NOTE 45p.; Ed.D. Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Practicum Papers (043)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Content Analysis; Critical Viewing; Day Care Centers; Early Childhood Education; *Films; *Mass Media Effects; Parent Attitudes; *Preschool Children; *Rating Scales; Stereotypes; Teacher Attitudes; Videotape Cassettes; Violence
IDENTIFIERS *Developmentally Appropriate Programs; *Film Viewing

ABSTRACT

This practicum identified a lack of standards for movie viewing by children age 3 through 6 at a preschool child care center, and proposed a rating scale to determine the suitability of videotaped films. Staff and parents of students seemed unaware of potential long-term adverse affects of some movies, such as desensitizing children to violence, providing stereotypes that children will imitate or model, and possibly fostering misconceptions. A rating scale was developed that graded films on theme content, production quality, violence, language/role modeling, and stereotypes. A rating of at least 81 out of a possible score of 100 was considered the minimum for recommended viewing. Forty movie videos and television programs were rated, with the results dispersed to parents and staff at the center. Twelve of the 40 movies and program received a score of 81 or higher. It was noted that some movies produced by the Disney Corporation and other family-orientated distributors did not meet the minimum score, even though the films were geared toward preschoolers. (Three appendixes provide a list of familiar movies for 3- to 6-year-olds, a movie rating tally sheet, and the ratings of 40 movies and television programs.) (MDM)

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Increasing Teacher/Parent Awareness of Developmentally Appropriate Movies for 3-6 Year Olds Through Use of a Rating Scale

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Cluster 50

A Practicum I Report Presented to the
Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

1994

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

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This practicum report was submitted by Merilyn R. Truxal under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University

Approved:

11 February 1994

Date of Final Approval of Report

Roberta Wong Bouverat

Roberta Wong Bouverat, Ph.D.,

Adviser

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer is grateful to Tracy Truxal Yocca, school secretary, for the hours devoted not only to rating the movies, but the care to see that they were rated with the most consistency possible. Acknowledgement is also given to Michael Yocca who helped with computer details.

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ABSTRACT

Increasing Teacher/Parent Awareness of Developmentally Appropriate Movies for 3-6 Year Olds Through Use of a Rating Scale. Truxal, Merilyn R., 1993: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Mass Media Effects/Television Surveys/Mass Media Use/Film Study/Child Development/Concept Formation/Nursery School/Day Care/Teacher Education

This practicum identified a lack of standards for media viewing by children ages 3-6 at a pre-school/child care center. Staff and parents of students seemed unaware of potential long-term adverse effects such as accommodation with TV, desensitization to violence, imitation and modeling of stereotypes, and possible forming of misconceptions when preschoolers view inappropriate media. Several alternatives are given to provide for increased staff/parent awareness of the need for developmentally appropriate standards to be used when governing preschoolers media habits.

The writer developed a rating scale with criteria in the following categories: theme content, production quality, violence, language/role modeling, and stereotypes. Counted occurrences for the last three categories were totaled with subjective judgements for the first two categories. A rating of 81 points was considered the minimum score to recommend viewing.

Forty movie videos or television programs were rated and results dispersed to parents and staff at the center. Notice was taken of the fact that Disney movies did not necessarily all pass the minimum for the rating scale, even those generally considered to be geared toward preschoolers. Evidently the Disney label alone is not sufficient to recommend a movie for children ages 3-6.

Results of the development of the rating scale were that parents and staff had a standard to use when choosing videos. The school staff was confident in their decisions concerning which videos would be suitable for preschoolers to view at the preschool. Future videos will be able to be previewed using the same rating scale.

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Permission Statement

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

The school is a privately owned, state licensed nursery-kindergarten. A daily enrollment of 90 students includes 60 children between the ages of 3-6; many preschoolers attend the full day program. The remainder of the student body are before/after-school elementary students, who attend full day during summer camp. The program has been located in the same community of about 45,000 people since 1971. The writer is the director/owner of the school. The present location, built by the writer in 1990, is in a residential area where homeowners feel a strong sense of history and loyalty for family life. Many homes are passed from generation to generation. The school draws heavily from the local population.

Students are enrolled whenever there is a vacancy and are accepted on a first come/first serve basis. Many students attend the school from three years of age until the school graduation age of thirteen. Time is sufficient for staff, families, and students to know each other well over a long period of the developmental growth of the children.

Families at the school represent a wide cross-section of the community in terms of financial background. The ratio of private tuition to Title XX tuition is about 80:10. Because no differentiation in treatment is made between private and funded students, only the writer and school secretary know which students receive financial aid.

The school mission statement reflects the importance of the connection between the family and the school. The stated mission is to serve the children of the community, to value each child's uniqueness, and also to serve as an educational resource to parents, including

extended families. The school is an inclusive setting, which means that physically and mentally abled and disabled students are integrated into a school program that is adapted to meet each child's needs. Parents use a variety of parenting styles ranging from *laizzez-faire* to authoritarian. The school staff does not interfere directly with family choices of philosophy, but rather acts as a resource to support parents in whatever healthy range of choices are preferred by each family. The writer spends an average of ten hours per week consulting directly with parents or trying to find community resources to answer specific parental questions. Community social services are suggested whenever the well-being of the child seems at stake or whenever a parent seems open to such suggestions. The school maintains a lending library of books, pamphlets, and magazine articles pertaining to parenting issues.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The staff includes the writer, five teachers, three assistant teachers, and one secretary. Staff is comprised of teams of teachers, most consisting of one mentor teacher and one assistant teacher. The kindergarten teacher has a master of science degree in early education. The special educator has a master of education degree in early education and certification in special education. Three staff members have a bachelor of science degree either in early education or in psychology with an educational emphasis. Three assistant teachers have associate of applied science degrees in early education. The secretary also attends all staff meetings because of daily contact with children in a variety of supporting roles. The writer is midway through work on an Ed.D. program in Child and Youth Studies.

Turnover of staff is not high, so opportunities for in-depth staff development are possible. The school was the first center in the county to receive accreditation from the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, a division of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The accomplishment required extra effort from all

staff members in the form of additional meetings for self-evaluation over a period of eighteen months, including an on-site validation visit.

Approximately 45% of the writer's time is spent in planning or implementing staff development. The writer believes that modeling is one effective method of training staff. Therefore, the writer regularly participates in direct teaching, usually through demonstration lessons in rhythm bands or in Montessori reading or math lessons. The writer often joins a class during free play, in order to model specific ways to interact with preschoolers who are practicing socialization skills.

Staff meetings are held at regular intervals during the school year. A written agenda is followed. Concerns effecting the developmental/emotional needs of specific students are discussed. A staff member may initiate a group consultation to address special needs or concerns of a school family. Decisions are made regarding scheduling, curriculum, or the school calendar. Staff training and development sessions are then conducted by the writer.

The writer also believes that the staff must be constantly aware of new ideas and methods in the field. Each teacher in turn presents a short literature review taken from professional journals at staff meetings. Throughout the school year, teachers attend professional conferences and receive paid time-off to observe professionals in other settings. The philosophy of the school centers around the ability to make a real difference in people's daily lives. Therefore, the staff must be as informed as possible in the many aspects of life effecting families at the school.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

Television is part of the life of nearly every American family. More families in the USA own televisions than refrigerators or indoor plumbing (Kielwasser & Wolf, 1987). Most parents would agree that much of television programming is unsuitable for children to watch. However, stressful lifestyles today seem to allow little time to pursue other activities. Unfortunately, the television is always ready for whatever relaxation time is available to each family.

An alternative for many concerned families in the USA has been to substitute videos for television. Most families rely on Walt Disney videos as the sure measure of quality entertainment for children. A typical family Friday night for parents at the school is a Disney rental and a pizza. Recent children's movies reflect the fact that parents also watch the Disney movies. *Aladdin*, a 1992 Disney release, is aimed specifically at entertaining the adult audience accompanying young children to the movies. Obviously, children would not be expected to discern the impersonation of personalities such as Ed Sullivan, master of ceremonies of a famous television show from the 1950s.

Effects of watching television/videos were observed in conversations at the preschool. Four year olds gathered around a vicious-looking stuffed dinosaur proclaimed by the owner to be a *Jurassic Park* dinosaur. The announcement set off a rhythmic chant of "Jurassic Park, Jurassic Park" among the children. Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* is the 1993 media-blitzed horror movie so graphic that newscasters announced on evening news that the movie was

unsuitable for children (Ansen, 1993).

Looking around the preschool on a typical day, one can see that all the lunch boxes, book bags, raincoats, tee-shirts, and tennis shoes advertise the latest media fads. *Jurassic Park* features over 1000 available commercial items (Giles & Foote, 1993). Most are geared to appeal to preschoolers' taste. Teachers have difficulty convincing students to bring any Show and Tell that isn't an action figure or Barbie doll or related in some way to a movie or TV program.

Results can be seen in dramatic play at school. The alert teacher must always be ready to elicit reasonable solutions when children are first learning to share equipment and space. However, a new teacher in today's society may be unprepared for the necessity to block ninja-kicks, a popular reaction to problem-solving among children who have watched the Ninja Turtle movies or TV series.

Most parents and teachers seem to accept television and movies as a natural part of childhood, feeling that normal children will grow up without residual effects. Not enough attention has been given to the possible damage inflicted on a nation of children raised with the daily enticement of television, or the insistent pervasiveness of violent or sexual theme content.

While the visible effects may be collectively stunning, the internalized messages may be more dangerous. Most adults do not seem to connect the escalating violence in our nation's schools with the violence children have grown used to watching on the screen. Adults responsible for the growth and development of young children are not sufficiently aware of the potentially adverse effects the media influence can have on preschoolers.

The writer composed a survey, "Familiar Movies for 3-6 Year Olds," to determine student media habits. Forty-seven out of sixty parents of preschoolers enrolled in the school

completed and returned the survey. Most parents indicated on the survey that an adult watched movies with a preschooler at least the first time. Five out of five parents of three year olds reported that a preschooler had watched certain Disney movies multiple times. Some children watched the same video over 100 times. Results showed that 36 out of 47 children between the ages of three and six watched *Beauty and the Beast* a coliective total of 631 times (see Table 1).

The writer viewed three of the videos on the survey in order to enumerate the violence watched by preschoolers. For identification as a violent act, an event had to involve hard, physical contact of a human or animal in which the victim was obviously supposed to be adversely affected by the action. Violence could involve using fists or other body parts, using an implement, or wielding a weapon.

Beauty and the Beast, in cartoon form, contains 46 counted violent occurrences. About half of the surveys indicated that parents realized that *Batman* would be unsuitable for preschoolers to watch. Parents did not recognize the violence in *Beauty and the Beast*.

All three movies shown in the table had huge promotional campaigns aimed at preschoolers. Fast food restaurants sold promotional gimmicks along with meal deals. Advertisements were geared to preschoolers, which undoubtedly helped families to associate the movies with the preschool age group.

Table 1

Relation in Three Sample Videos Between Frequency of Viewing to Acts of Violence

MOVIE	Na	Nb	*TOTAL TIMES VIEWED	ACTS OF VIOLENCE
BATMAN	17	16	47	85
HOME ALONE	30	17	199	48
BEAUTY & THE BEAST	36	30	631	46

Na number of students who viewed the movie/video
Nb number of parents who viewed the movie/video
* total times movie was viewed by all children

The teachers and parents lacked the ability to judge the worth of movie/videos for viewing at school by preschoolers. Teachers and parents at the school were evidently unaware of developmentally appropriate guidelines for teachers and parents to use for evaluating movies/videos for preschoolers.

Problem Documentation

The school had no written standards by which teachers could judge the worth of a movie/video for students ages 3-6. During the winter months, Friday afternoon was Movie Day at the school. Students were permitted to bring in a favorite video to share with classmates. Six out of six Friday afternoon staff reported feelings of insecurity concerning the best way to handle a situation when parents sent in obviously inappropriate videos. On occasion, teachers asked the parent if the child really brought the tape with parental permission. An affirmative reply made the staff uneasy. Showing the movie ignored developmentally appropriate practice and perhaps went against the values of other parents at the center. Refusing to show the movie might have hurt the feelings of the child who brought

in the video.

The school also had no written standard by which staff could help parents determine whether a particular movie would be acceptable to be shown. Parents had no formal guidelines to help select appropriate media for children.

The staff used the Disney label as one current standard by which to judge the appropriateness of movie content for ages 3-6. Nine out of nine staff members at the school stated in a staff meeting the belief that a Disney movie would not require pre-viewing (personal communication, January 7, 1993). Disney produced *Beauty and the Beast*, the movie that contained 46 separate acts of violence.

A temporary ban was declared for Movie Day. A better system needed to be found to predetermine which movies would be developmentally appropriate for the preschool student body.

Causative Analysis

The entry of the VCR and cable networks into American home life has meant that children are exposed to a wider variety of movies at an early age. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, violence on TV tripled during the 1980s (Waters, 1993). Parents may not realize that the preschooler could be paying attention to the television/video while playing with other toys at the same time. Focusing in and out of a program may represent a long-term problem. A longitudinal study of TV viewing patterns in young children (Huston et al, 1987) indicated that during the preschool years children develop viewing habits, forming what is termed an accommodation with TV. Accommodation refers to the child's ability to become accustomed to the presence of the TV displaying a program while the child is engaged in other activities in the same room. The child is able to "tune in" to the production whenever something of interest catches the child's attention. Such selective viewing makes it difficult to

determine exactly what the child is cognitively gleaning from the program, but it seems evident that such selective attention would not help young children grasp a moral message delivered with any indirectness.

The ramifications of selective attention may already be filtering into the way children learn. The relationship between selective attention to TV and children's comprehension of content has been shown by Calvert, Huston, Watkins, and Wright (1982). Ultimately, the delivery of the education system may be affected. Parents who are aware of the wasteland of television programming and who turn to videos as an alternative, are only trading one presentation for another, while the concept of selective attention remains.

Many parents do not seem aware of the issue of "desensitization" in terms of the exposure of children to violence. Desensitization refers to the repetition of a violent or obscene act so often that the viewer stops being emotionally repulsed and accepts the action as normal. Perhaps adults have already become desensitized to violence so that the effect on children is unnoticed. The concept of desensitization is not new. Alexander Pope (Cole, 1967) referred to it in the eighteenth century when he wrote:

> Vice is a monster of so frightful mein,
> As to be hated, needs but to be seen:
> Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
> We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

Parents and teachers also seem unaware of the potential for "imaging" with children between the ages of 3-6. Imaging has been found to be an effective tool for adults. Athletes mentally picture themselves moving through an event beforehand in order to visualize themselves successfully winning (McGarvey, 1990). Videos are produced for amateurs to watch repeatedly in order to image professional body movements in a tennis or golf swing. Yet most adults do not make the connection from videos designed to alter behavior on the tennis courts to videos that incidentally alter behavior in preschoolers.

Often adults, parents and teachers alike, overvalue a movie/video because the production is so accomplished. The production and musical score of *Beauty and the Beast* is beautiful, and parents naturally consider it a top choice for children, even preschoolers. Actually, the plot may be frightening for many preschoolers. Parents who are unaware of developmental stages in preschoolers may not consider the natural tendency of younger children to confuse reality with fantasy.

Adults also appear to believe that a movie starring children is intended for children to view. However, closer scrutiny often shows that the child star's roles include obnoxious behaviors that range from rudeness to physically dangerous. The children in *Home Alone* are inappropriate role models for preschoolers because of the use of bad language, rudeness to adults and to each other, and obvious lack of positive concern for others. The star, a young boy accidently left at home alone for an extended period of time, is capable of planning and completing terroristic actions as protection against two would-be burglars. Informal discussions at the school with children as old as eleven years were distressing. Every student who had watched the movie believed that the main message was that a bright eight year old with the ability to plan ahead could handle dangerous intruders (personal communications, January 3, 1993).

Possibly parents are reluctant to face the reality of potential risk to children because today's life style would be very difficult to maintain with restricted television/video use for young children. Many working parents and children feel stressed by the end of a long day. The television is such an indispensable part of American lives because it meets so many needs. A longitudinal study on television viewing patterns (Huston et al, 1987) noted that families watched television based on time available more than on particular interest in certain shows. Thus, families will sit down together in the early evening to watch a program such as *The*

Simpsons, which ridicules a bright daughter while extolling an underachieving, combative son. At least part of the justification for such viewing might be the convenient time slot of the program.

While some parents take an active role in determining the content of programs children watch, many more are simply too tired to think about such issues. Many families at the school complain about the inability to keep up with the volume of work that goes into maintaining a family household while also working an outside job. So far, research has found much evidence to prove correlation between viewing of violence and aggression in children, but actual causal relationships are much more difficult to prove (Viemero, 1986). Because experts cannot say that causal relationships between violence and viewing time is immediately evident, and because the presence of the television may be an hypnotic relaxant to a stressful family, and because families are already at the edge of the ability to handle stress, the issues are ignored.

At the school, even parents who monitor children's television/videos complain that no choices are available at stores except lunch boxes, tennis shoes, hats, or book bags bearing commercials for the very shows the families are trying to censor. Sometimes, children swayed by advertisements will accept nothing else. The daily presence of such products is a continual promotion for the media.

On the other hand, if parents refuse to purchase certain toys for children, the youngsters may become so out of touch that socialization opportunities are lost. Some experts suggest that when children are denied complete access to television, there is a loss of common cultural background with peers (Kielwasser & Wolf, 1987). A major problem in American family life is maintaining appropriate proportions in a land where the advertising motto apparently is "more is better."

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Children ages 3-6 are at a vulnerable stage of development. Young children find it hard to discriminate between reality and fiction. Feshback (1983) states that very young children are incapable of telling the difference between reality and fiction on the screen. While some experts hope that watching violence on television has the cathartic effect of dispelling violent emotions, Feshback believes that aggressive behavior is more likely to be aroused, especially in younger children.

Research has shown that preschoolers are not really capable of discerning any but the most simple affective messages received from watching television. Preschoolers watching *Sesame St.* segments (Hayes & Casey, 1992), could not describe any of the emotions portrayed by the puppets even when the acting was performed with obvious overstatement. Children did little better with segments of *The Cosby Show*, even though the scenes showed Olivia, a four year old to whom preschoolers might expect to relate. Research indicated that even when prompted with appropriate labels, young viewers could only recall the emotions of those segments where adults were portraying emotions that the child had likely experienced personally. Even then, children frequently forgot the emotional reaction by the time the segment was completed. Young children are unable to absorb the complete plot, and are, therefore, likely to miss the crucial motivational highlights that would help a child extract a moral message from most dramas.

Kagan (Thirteen/WNET & The Childhood Project, 1986) emphasized the role of the environment in developing a moral sense as being "paramount" to childhood. Kagan described the role of the community as that of helping the child struggle to gain a conscience by intervening and stopping aggression. When the child sees aggression on television and interprets, correctly or not, that no adult intervened, Kagan believes that the child is going to

be able to personally commit aggression more easily with fewer feelings of guilt.

Piaget & Inhelder (1969) speak of the "memory of recognition" and the "memory of evocation" (p 80). These memories refer to the images that young children carry mentally and are able to conjure up to produce a representative image. For many children, an overwhelming amount of mental images come from television, movies, or videos. Yet television and movies are filled with situations where the underlying morality is too subtle to impress young children. Adults must question what information preschoolers are internalizing from the programs.

An example was conveyed to the staff recently by a parent from the school. The mother was intent on helping her nine year old son appreciate the moral message in *I'll Fly Away* (a popular TV show depicting the South during the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s). She did not notice that her four year old daughter was also watching the program and that the preschooler was getting an entirely different message. The following day, the young girl cried when it was time to go to her sitter (who is Afro-American). The daughter begged her mother to "remember that program last night, Mom. It said you weren't supposed to have a black sitter for me." Her mother tried desperately to imagine where her daughter could have come to that conclusion. The mother finally realized that the child had internalized the immorality of the racists in *I'll Fly Away*, and was accidentally perceiving the entirely opposite message than was intended (S. Dawson, personal communication, March, 1993). The mother pondered whether she would ever have realized her daughter's misinterpretation had the two events not occurred on successive days.

It is difficult to judge whether young children are influenced most by the "drip-drip" or the "drench" effect of watching too much television (Reep & Dambrot, 1989). The drip-drip effect refers to the long range erosion of the child's values by the consistent viewing of some message such as sexual stereotypes, for example. The drench effect could be described as the

toll extracted from observing one particularly vivid act of violence.

Children's play is affected by programming on television or videos. An early childhood teacher (Gronlund, 1992) describes student play as lacking in imagination or inventiveness, but instead as derivative, composed of imitations of television shows such as *911*. After watching violence on television, Israeli city children acted out more violence than those in the Kibbutz, although no one has yet determined exactly why that is true (Huesmann & Bachrach, 1986). One assumption would be that the stress of city life is a factor. If that is so, then some children may be at more risk than others watching the same programs.

Occasionally, someone in the government notices that many young children are watching television for too many hours a week. The Hearings on Media Violence held by the United States Senate (1984) addressed the issues. Banta, an early education teacher, noted that broadcasters would not be able to sell advertisements for television time if the sponsors didn't believe it possible to influence viewers. Trying to defend the opposite viewpoint, Fowles, a professor of Human Science and Humanities, expressed the belief that children learn at an early age the difference between fantasy and reality, and that after the ages of *six or seven* (italics added), most can tell the difference. The logical conclusion is that children under six years cannot tell the difference between fantasy and reality and need much guidance in selecting appropriate programs to watch.

The major television networks agreed to post parental advisory warnings against their most violent programs in the fall 1994 lineup (Waters, 1993). Such proclamations of reform have historically been ineffective ("Standards set," 1992). The Children's Television Act of 1990 had little effect on programming. In fact, programmers dragged out old cartoons such as *The Jetsons*, claiming the presence of educational value because the cartoon was preparing children for life in future centuries ("Lewis, puppet criticizes," 1993).

Some in the entertainment field hoped that the advent of cable TV would mean better quality selection, with a wider range of offerings that might include quality programming for children. That has not happened, and in fact has turned out to offer even more inappropriate viewing opportunities for children. Research shows that parents using pay channels on cable TV do not monitor children's viewing anymore than parents with basic or no cable channels (Atkin, Heeter, & Baldwin, 1989). With the advent of over 500 cable channels being promised in the near future, opportunities for young children to watch movies rated parental guidance (PG) or restricted (R) will be even greater.

Simon, Chair of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Television Violence for Children (1993, May 21) urged the presidents of the major cable companies to agree on industry standards for violence, in order to avoid having the government set such standards. Simon stated that although he could not say officially that violence on television was the "cause" of the escalating violence in the nation, it was certainly "part of the mosaic." The problem from the viewpoint of the cable networks seems to be one of competition for ratings among consumers. Another Industry Conference on Violence was held in Los Angeles on August 2 1993. Janet Reno, Attorney General, issued a warning to the cable networks that the government would step in to regulate programming if the networks did not police themselves in regard to program content.

Certainly, many professionals are blaming our society for not paying enough attention to influencing agents in our lives. That would include not only television networks, but also parents who allow children indiscriminate viewing of television/movies. Too many adults feel that violence presented in a humorous way is acceptable for young children. Even movie reviewers were outraged at the blatant violence generated by Kevin McCallister in *Home Alone* 2 (Gleiberman, 1992; Hunter, 1992), yet some children at the school reported attending the

movie with parents.

Some parents may not know that adult viewing habits influence children. Research (Singer & Singer, 1986) indicates a relationship between the amount of television a parent watches and the amount the children also watch. Those findings indicate that too much media viewing tends to produce preschoolers who are more restless, have fears, suffer dysphoria, and who are prone to aggressiveness. It is hard to imagine that any parent would willingly choose those traits for children.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The following goals were projected for this practicum. The staff at the preschool will become more confident in selecting appropriate videos for students ages 3-6 to watch at the school. Teachers and parents will be able to assess the worth of a video, movie, or TV series for home and school viewing.

Expected Outcomes

The following outcomes were projected for this practicum. The school will have written criteria by which the staff can determine the age appropriateness of a movie/video shown during Movie Day. Currently, there is no policy for teachers to use to explain school standards to parents concerning use of movie/video viewing. By the end of the three month implementation period, the school will have a written standard to use to explain age-appropriateness of television/videos for ages 3-6 to all parents. By the end of the three month implementation period, the staff will adopt the Disney label as acceptable standard for preschool viewing only when it matches the school's written policy.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGIES

Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

A method was needed to help teachers and parents evaluate the appropriateness of specific movie/videos for preschoolers. Teachers and parents needed to become sensitive to the effects of the media on preschoolers.

Adverse behavior is often correlated to amounts of time spent viewing any TV program rather than specific content of any one show. Therefore some experts advocate parental limitations for children (Dorr, Kovaric, & Doubleday, 1989). By using influence at the school, the staff could have tried to help parents see the need to limit the amount of television/videos young children watch.

Limiting the amount of time children watch television is a good concept if families could be convinced to try alternative methods of spending spare time. Realistically, however, the problem is not simply to convince parents that people *ought* to watch less television, but actually to have parents accomplish the task. Most parents watch too much television, possibly because of the hypnotically relaxing, undemanding ambience. Many adults, describing something from television, will preface remarks by saying, "I never watch television, but I happened to turn it on the other night and ...", indicating that adults already know the family watches too much television and feel guilty about it. Affecting change would require parents to agree to a really motivated effort, probably similar in magnitude to the reformation of smokers or alcoholics. The attempt would certainly be possible, but would

require extreme willpower.

Suggestions for alternative ways to spend time with children could have been encouraged through the school, thus cutting down on family time spent watching television/videos. The writer had already produced a video called, *Share Your Hobby with Your Child: It's Worth the Effort*. The video features families from the school participating in adult hobbies with preschoolers. Families are shown skiing together, constructing birdhouses, baking, gardening, playing computer games, and riding horses. The video is available for parents to borrow and has been shown at area workshops. The purpose of the video is to demonstrate positive family models participating in activities that are more appealing than watching television together. The school could have promoted the video again, with notices in the school newsletters and posters hung throughout the school.

Parents seem to want to spend more time with children in activities other than watching television. Parental reactions to the hobby tape were positive. On the other hand, the hypnotic appeal of the television to stressful lives is so pervasive that the writer hesitated to advocate too great a change too suddenly. Like the gramme of *soma* used to maintain the population's emotional stability in *Brave New World* (Huxley, 1932), the possibility exists that time spent in front of the "boob-tube" is actually maintaining sanity in some lives.

A simple short-term solution was possible for the problems surrounding Movie Day at the preschool. The current ban on all video viewing at the school was continued until a permanent solution was found. It was not difficult to insert another activity in that time slot, since the ban had already been on for several months. However, a complete ban does not offer the possibility of raising the consciousness of families to watch better quality programs at home. A ban does not offer the opportunity for a teacher to affect the internalization of certain issues by commenting or leading class discussion at a crucial point in the plot.

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The staff could have been taught the "peace curriculum" to try to offset the violence children are watching at home (Carlsson-Paige, & Levin, 1992). The peace curriculum involves helping children find non-combative ways to positive problem-solving.

Teachers could have taken an active part in changing the way children problem-solve. Actually, that is already occurring. Some children react better than others to such interventions. In the process of considering whole class dynamics, certain children in any group seem to lack ability to concentrate or to attend to tasks. Although there could be several reasons for the behavior, Singer and Singer (1986) have found direct correlation between such children and the amount of time spent watching television. Research has not determined whether children who have these characteristics watch more television or whether personality reflects the influence of watching more than average amounts of television. Clearly, someone needs to make parents aware of the correlation. Teachers can change the school environment in many ways, but parents must still be enlightened.

One kindergarten teacher who realized that children learn by constructing reality out of personal experiences decided to flow with the situation. The teacher encouraged her class to build language skills by using references to the Ninja Turtle television series (Gronlund, 1992). As children described recent shows, the teacher prompted for more detail and accuracy in the descriptions. The students composed plays using the turtles as main characters, with the teacher challenging stereotypical roles when necessary. Gradually, the students were able to incorporate learning skills into the classroom in situations where the teacher could participate actively in determining the way the students internalized information about violent media characters.

Teachers at the preschool already were trying to use references from children's own experiences to motivate students. Because it was impossible to stop the ninja kicking one fall,

part of the dramatic play area was set aside for three "Turtles" to use. The children could pretend kick; children were not to actually connect with another person's body. The area was popular for a few days. After that, children would attempt to act out a particular scene, but could not remember enough details to do so. The children soon stopped playing Turtles and the area was changed to something more usable. Possibly the different circumstances were due to a difference in ages. The children in the Gronlund study were kindergarten, while the students at this center were three and four years. Just one year makes a difference in cognitive and verbal ability.

Another problem with encouraging teachers to use Turtles or other video media in school curriculum was that the teachers would need to watch the programs often enough to know what the characters really represent, in order to have any influence on the internalization children are making from the programs. While attempts could be made on a small level to motivate children, to do so on a large scale seems to be a cross purposes with the project. The promotional items already keep the students too aware of the programs on a daily basis.

Guidelines for family television viewing include setting time limits, planning together which shows to watch intentionally, participating in discussions with the child as families watch programs together, and expressing parental views by writing to local television stations (ERIC Digest, 1986). Besides trying to influence the stations, a campaign could have been initiated to send letters to the editor of the local newspaper, trying to educate parents on the issue of preschoolers viewing violence. Hopefully, such letters could cause some people to think about media issues and might have been a good idea in conjunction with other assertive measures.

Letters to the editor might have helped to spark discussion at some level in the community. However, it is doubtful whether a campaign has a lasting day to day effect on

very many families. Because television is so much a part of the daily life of most families, it seems unlikely that many additional families would be willing to undergo the enormous changes in lifestyle necessary to seriously limit media exposure because of a letter campaign.

The writer could hold parent meetings, hoping to educate parents to the reality that children are watching inappropriate video productions. Parents could be provided with illustrations to demonstrate that 2-7 year olds are in a preoperational stage of development where use of semiotic function is crucial to development (Miller, 1989). Practical examples of how the preoperational stage affects preschoolers judgements and perceptions could have been included. Talking to parents on a personal level could be a productive way to effect change. It might be best to combine information about videos/TV viewing during a regularly scheduled parent meeting, but the months of November through January are not good months for parent meetings because of bad weather and busy holidays.

Description of Selected Solution

In the past few months, a few magazines have issued ratings to judge either television or videos. Mitchard (1993) edited a *TV Guide* top ten, rating television programs in sections for ages 2-6, ages 7-11, and ages 12-17. *TV Guide* also published a special issue ("Summer's Best Bets," 1993) containing letter grade ratings for television, videos, movies, cassettes, books, and even toys, all categorized by age groups. *Working Woman* issued a list of "guilt-free" books and videos, each compiled with a suitable age range ("Videos are 'Guilt-free'," 1992). Hundreds of titles at a child-care center were screened to write a book, *Top Ten Videos, Free of Violence and Race or Sex Bias* (1992).

A rating scale was the intervention chosen to educate parents and staff to appropriate content in movies/videos without raising defensiveness about personal choices. Providing parents with a rating scale educates families to the need to regulate the programs preschoolers

watch. Such action seems in line with the NAEYC position statement on violence (1993) in the lives of children which urges the need for teachers to work with parents to establish links to counteract the growing violence in our country.

A rating scale based on developmental appropriateness provides suitable criteria for children ages 3-6. Ratings in magazines are generally limited to the writer's personal opinions about interest levels, rather than considering developmental levels of children. The writer devised a rating scale that would consistently rate all movies/videos/TV series by the same criteria.

Report of Action Taken

By offering sub-ratings in several different categories, the rating scale allows families to select movies at home that suit individual family life styles, while making clear to families the standards that the school will adopt. Categories include theme appropriateness, language usage, anti-bias stereotypes, violence, and production quality. Each category contains four separate criteria worth five points each, for an total category combination of twenty points. A movie/video with a perfect score would rate 100 points. The raters decided that only movies that rate a total of 81 or higher (4 and 5 stars) would qualify for viewing at the school by students ages 3-6.

A tally sheet (Appendix B) was used to rate each selection. The results from the forty rated selections were recorded onto a single movie rating sheet that parents and staff can use for quick reference. For those interested in seeing the actual counted occurrences in each category, master copies of the category score sheets will be available in the school library located in the office.

The productions were all rated by the writer and the school secretary. The two raters began by collaborating on a set of acceptable criteria while viewing several videos together, to

be sure of consistency of counted occurrences. Both raters then worked separately to view a total of 40 videos or TV programs.

One potential problem when rating multiple programs is that one or both of the raters might become desensitized through repeated observations of violence or stereotypes. Midway through the rating process, the two raters and a third teacher again rated a movie together to compare any drifts away from the original definitions. Some judgement consistency is required when rating violence because a fight could be considered to consist of one act of violence or several separate acts. Although the counted occurrences occasionally differed within a particular line item for each rater (one rater might rate a specific act as sarcasm, another as poor role modeling), the category scores were very similar. On no occasion did the final rating score vary between raters. Therefore, the raters were deemed to be judging the movies with the same consistency.

At first, the raters were somewhat concerned because the length of videos ranged from 59 to 89 minutes. Since no valid research reveals how much violence in a certain time period is too much, the length of the programs was eventually determined to be relatively unimportant. Ten acts of violence are too many in whatever time period they are dispersed.

The same problem occurred with rating TV programs. Children could potentially watch several TV programs in a row, each containing sufficient violence to make a combined impact. The only antidote seemed to be to raise parental awareness of the adverse potential for watching too much television.

The possibility of rating even a representative sampling of TV programs was impossible, considering how many networks exist today. The quality of some programs vary from episode to episode. Particular TV programs chosen either rated very highly or very poorly. The writer decided to send home a newsletter synthesizing some research about TV and preschoolers

along with a rating scale containing only recommended TV programs (see Table 2).

Table 2

Ratings of Recommended TV Shows for Ages 3-6

TV RATINGS FOR AGES 3-6							
NAME OF MOVIE	THEME	PRODUCTIONS	VIOLENCE	LANGUAGE	STEREOTYPE	TS	R
possible points	**20**	**20**	**20**	**20**	**20**	**100**	**5***
BARNEY & FRIENDS	20	12	20	20	20	92	5*
LAMB CHOPS	19	18	20	19	20	96	5*
MISTER RODGERS	20	18	20	20	20	98	5*
SESAME STREET	20	20	20	18	20	98	5*
READING RAINBOW	19	20	20	20	20	99	5*
BIG BIRD GOES TO CHINA	20	20	20	18	20	98	5*
BIG BIRD GOES TO JAPAN	20	20	18	20	20	98	5*

TS = Total Score
R = Rating

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

The center had no criteria for judging the appropriateness of videos brought to school by parents. The development of a rating scale gave parents and staff criteria by which to judge the quality of a video/TV program for children ages 3-6.

Information about the rating scale was presented at a staff meeting. The writer first discussed the preoperational stage of development. The child's construction of mental images was reviewed and discussed. Research highlights discovered during the practicum period were synthesized for the staff. A discussion on the pervasive quality of the television into daily family life cited specific examples of research.

The rating scale was introduced and teachers were given time to examine the scale and ask questions. Staff was advised that the school will henceforth show only videos to children ages 3-6 that rate at least 81 points on the rating scale. Movie day at school can now be reinstated, since there is suitable criteria for determining which movies will be shown. The staff was reminded that any time a movie is shown, a range of alternate activities will always be available for children who are not interested in watching the video.

Segments from *Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin*, and *The Little Mermaid* were shown to illustrate scenes of violence, stealing, and disobedience. Since staff has been showing interest in the project during the past several months, teachers were already fairly informed about

content of the movies. Even so, the accumulated effect of seeing just selected segments of the three movies was stunning to the staff, once attention was drawn to the issues of violence, gender bias, and age bias. Of particular interest was the fact that all three segments shown were from Disney movies. The staff agreed that adults are being de-sensitized to violence in the media. The staff also agreed that the Disney label by itself cannot be used to determine the suitability of a movie for preschool children. The rating scale will be the criteria for video use during the school day.

Discussion

Emphasis at the staff meeting was placed on the importance of watching a video along with the children. The staff was reminded that short pointed comments occasionally help children make important moral connections in a movie. The staff debated at some length what to do about the school age students, since the rating scale would not be appropriate for rating their preferences. After discussion, the staff decided to use the same rating scale for younger school age students (ages 6-9). If the older school age students (ages 10-12) ask to see a movie, the staff will use that opportunity to help the older students design their own rating scale, using the school rating scale as a model.

Teachers were asked at the staff meeting whether any portion of the rating scale or tally sheets required clarification. One teacher suggested that the counted occurrences scoring at the bottom of the tally sheet be tied to the caption "counted occurrences in the body of the rating scale so that the reader could immediately see the connection. The adjustments were made.

Information from the meeting was sent home to parents, along with the rating scale. Posters were also hung on the parent bulletin boards in both wings reminding parents to use the rating scale in selecting videos for Movie Day. Initial reaction from parents has been favorable. Some parents have asked whether we would preview a particular video that is not

currently on the list, which is seen as a positive sign. Current plans are to keep the rating scale updated by adding new productions every year, and also to try to rate movies upon request by parents, staff, or students.

Parents may use the rating scale even if the choice is made to show videos at home with ratings of less than 81 points. For example, if some bad language appears in a movie, and the parent feels the movie contains quality programming otherwise, the parent could make a suitable comment at the appropriate time to show disapproval. One point that is important for parents to grasp is that particular movies may not be offensive in general, but may be very inappropriate for children under six years of age.

Recommendations

Any first attempt at a rating scale will need revision as more products are reviewed and new situations arise in plots that do not seem to fit the rating scale. Any time the rating scale is adjusted, all movies will need to be re-rated. Parts of the movie *The Wizard of Oz* reminded the writer that the rating scale does not really contain a section to rate scariness of a video. One teacher noted the omission at the staff meeting. Future rating scales should include scariness, perhaps under "Theme Content."

The whole rating scale would be strengthened by adapting the first two categories in such a way that they can be measured in counted occurrences rather than subjective opinion. Future rating scales will be refined in such ways.

Dissemination

The rating scale will be shared with a wider audience. The writer plans to submit the rating scale to professional journals. Already a proposal has been submitted to present the rating scale to a regional child care convention in the spring of 1994.

The rating scale will also be sent to NAEYC headquarters. NAEYC's position paper on

violence (1993) addresses the issue of violence in the media. The association may welcome rating scales to help determine standards.

One teacher at the staff meeting suggested that the rating scale be sent to Disney productions in the hope that they would begin to use a child development specialist as a consultant to their future movie productions for preschoolers. The writer intends to do so.

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APPENDIX A

FAMILIAR MOVIES FOR 3-6 YEAR OLDS

FAMILIAR MOVIES FOR 3-6 YEAR OLDS

PARENTS:

Please check the appropriate boxes below. Please return to school asap. Thank you for your cooperation.

AGE OF CHILD

HAS YOUR CHILD SEEN THIS MOVIE?	YES	NO	#TIMES	ADULT ALSO WATCHED?
101 Dalmatians				
Aladdin				
American Tale				
Bambi				
Batman				
Beauty and the Beast				
Charlotte's Web				
Fantasia				
Home Alone				
Home Alone 2				
Lady and the Tramp				
Mighty Ducks				
Parent Trap				
Pinocchio				
Pollyanna				
Sleeping Beauty				
Sound of Music				
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles				
The Little Mermaid				
Wizard of Oz				

APPENDIX B

TALLY SHEET

MOVIE/TV RATING SCALE FOR AGES 3-6: TALLY SHEET

NAME OF MOVIE/TV PROGRAM:
PRODUCED BY:

THEME CONTENT	OVERALL JUDGEMENT	SCORE
A. caring attitude toward others	scale of 5-0 (5 best)	
B. positive problem-solving approaches	scale of 5-0 (5 best)	
C. appropriate, interesting topic for age group	scale of 5-0 (5 best)	
D. understandable content at minimum 75% of movie	scale of 5-0 (5 best)	
TOTAL THEME CONTENT CATEGORY SCORE OUT OF POSSIBLE 20 POINTS =		
PRODUCTION	**OVERALL JUDGMENT**	**SCORE**
A. beautifully produced	scale of 5-0 (5 best)	
B. quality musical score	scale of 5-0 (5 best)	
C. quality of animation/special effects	scale of 5-0 (5 best)	
D. overall positive effect	scale of 5-0 (5 best)	
TOTAL PRODUCTION CATEGORY SCORE OUT OF POSSIBLE 20 POINTS =		
	COUNTED OCCURRENCES	
VIOLENCE	1 mark for each event	SCORE
A. use of violence to solve problems		
B. examples of bullying		
C. accidental injuries meant to be humorous		
D. examples of practical jokes meant to ridicule		
TOTAL VIOLENCE CATEGORY SCORE OUT OF POSSIBLE 20 POINTS =		
LANGUAGE/ROLE MODELING	1 mark for each event	SCORE
A. swearing by main characters		
B. poor role modeling(ex: poor sport)		
C. sarcasm or disrespectful conversations		
D. use of poor grammar for children to imitate		
TOTAL LANGUAGE/ROLE MODELING CATEGORY SCORE OUT OF POSSIBLE 20 POINTS =		
STEREOTYPES	1 mark for each event	SCORE
A. gender bias		
B. slurs against disabilities		
C. racism		
D. slurs against older adults		
TOTAL STEREOTYPES CATEGORY SCORE OUT OF POSSIBLE 20 POINTS =		
TABULATION OF ALL CATEGORY SCORES (100 POSSIBLE POINTS) =		**MOVIE IS RATED:**

COUNTED OCCURRENCES	
0-1 times	5 points
2-3 times	4 points
4-5 times	3 points
6-7 times	2 points
8-9 times	1 point
10 or more	0 points

DIRECTIONS FOR RATING

First two categories are opinion.
Last three categories are tallied.
Use COUNTED OCCURRENCES chart to convert tallied events to points.

Each category = 20 possible points.
Tabulation of all points = score of possible 100 points.
Use KEY FOR RATING chart to change score to rating score.

Movies/videos rating **** or ***** acceptable for ages 3-6.

KEY FOR RATING	
91-100 points	*****
81-90 points	****
71-80 points	***
61-70 points	**
51-60 points	*
50 or less	0

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APPENDIX C

MOVIE/TV RATING SCALE FOR AGES 3-6

Name of Movie Possible Points:	Theme Out of 20	Production Out of 20	Violence Out of 20	Language/ Role Model Out of 20	Stereotype Out of 20	SCORE Out of 100	RATING Out of *****
101 Dalmations	17	19	7	13	19	75	***
Adams Family	14	18	4	13	20	69	**
Aladdin	12	18	4	13	17	64	**
Alice in Wonderland	14	20	8	18	20	80	***
American Tail	18	20	10	19	20	87	****
Bambi	18	19	15	19	20	91	*****
Batman	1	10	0	9	20	40	0
Beauty and the Beast	13	20	5	16	16	70	**
Beethovan	19	20	7	8	20	74	***
Charlotte's Web	19	20	17	19	20	95	*****
Disney Sing-Along Songs	20	20	12	20	18	90	****
Ferngully	17	18	13	15	20	83	****
Fievel Goes West	19	20	4	17	20	80	***
Great Mouse Detective	14	18	7	16	18	73	***
Home Alone	3	7	7	13	19	49	0
Homeward Bound	19	20	18	12	20	89	****
Hook	6	15	9	16	20	66	**
Jungle Book	18	19	9	13	20	79	***
Lady and the Tramp	19	20	9	14	20	82	****
Land Before Time	19	20	14	15	20	88	****
Little Mermaid	20	20	8	17	20	85	****
Little Nemo	19	19	10	16	20	84	****
Mighty Ducks	13	18	9	5	20	65	**
Peter Pan	15	19	3	15	16	68	**
Pinocchio	20	20	7	13	19	79	***
Rescuers	15	19	6	13	20	73	***
Rescuers Down Under	19	20	7	17	20	83	****
Sleeping Beauty	14	18	8	13	18	71	***
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	10	17	7	6	18	58	*
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle II	14	18	6	13	19	70	**
The Point	8	19	12	7	18	64	**
Wizard of Oz	16	20	15	20	20	91	*****